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TAGS: [GM](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [NATO](#) [PREL](#) [IQ](#) [EUN](#) [ECON](#)  
SUBJECT: STEINMEIER PLANNING FIRST TRIP TO IRAQ -- SIGNALS  
RENEWED ENGAGEMENT

Classified By: DCM JOHN KOENIG. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: German Minister of Foreign Affairs Frank-Walter Steinmeier is planning to visit Iraq in January 2009 soon after President-Elect Obama's inauguration -- his first visit as FM. According to the MFA, the visit comes on the heels of positive news from Iraq regarding the security and economic situation, as well as the election of Senator Obama. The Maliki government's demonstration of strength, the signing of the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), and the increase in economic and investment interest in Iraq over the past year have opened the door to Steinmeier's visit -- his first since hostilities began in 2003. Steinmeier intends to enhance Germany's partnership with Iraq and demonstrate Germany and Europe's desire to improve the transatlantic relationship. The MFA noted that Germany is developing additional ideas to assist with the Iraqi refugee issue. Germany also continues to slowly rebuild its business ties. END SUMMARY.

#### STEINMEIER UPCOMING TRIP TO IRAQ

12. (C) PolOff met with Klemens Semtner, head of the German MFA's Iraq Unit November 19 to discuss FM Steinmeier's planned January 2009 visit to Iraq. This trip, still in its planning stages, will include a one day visit to Baghdad with a side trip to inaugurate the German Consulate General in Erbil. While in Baghdad, Steinmeier plans to meet with senior-level government officials to discuss German engagement in Iraq including enhanced economic and business ties and opportunities to implement "quick-impact projects" (rather than offering additional financial contributions which Semtner indicated were "unnecessary"). Semtner noted that Iraqi PM Maliki's July 2008 visit to Berlin was a key factor in gaining support within the GOG for this visit.

13. (C) Semtner noted that Maliki's strengthening of the Iraqi government -- including the passage of the Provincial Election Law and the SOFA -- and the decrease in violence throughout the country are some of the reasons for planning the trip now. He also noted an increase in German business interest to re-enter the Iraqi market -- including the visit of Germany's Minister of Economics Michael Glos to Iraq -- and a generally optimistic feeling that "the worst is behind us." Without being pressed, Semtner also said that Germany, and indeed Europe in general, will be re-examining Iraq with an eye toward a renewed transatlantic relationship following Senator Obama's win November 4.

14. (C) Semtner also confirmed that the German office in Erbil will expand into a full Consulate General in early 2009. Construction plans for the Consulate are currently incomplete, however Steinmeier intends to hold a ceremony at the future building site and tour the temporary building Germany will use in the interim while there.

¶5. (C) According to Semtner, the German national 2009 elections in 2009 do not play a role in the timing and decision for Germany to assess the situation in Iraq to evaluate how it could provide effective assistance to the country's reconstructive process. Indeed, he indicated both major parties, Steinmeier's SPD and Chancellor Merkel's CDU, are in agreement that now is the time to do more.

#### ASSISTANCE FOR IRAQI REFUGEES

¶6. (C) Semtner stated that Germany is no longer focusing efforts to assist Christian refugees but will rather accept those with the greatest need according to UNHCR criteria. He did note, however, that the GOI's efforts to reintegrate Christians into Iraqi society have been "helpful but completely insufficient." As such, it is likely that the majority of Iraqi refugees who settle in Germany will be Christian. On November 21, German Federal Interior Minister Schuble and his state-level counterparts agreed to accept 2,500 Iraqi refugees -- currently residing in Jordan and Syria -- following an EU meeting on November 27 in Brussels.

¶7. (C) The MFA also announced November 20 that Germany will increase humanitarian aid to Iraq by 500,000 euros -- bringing the total sum of aid to five million euros. Of that, three million euros was channeled to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to assist internally and externally displaced Iraqis, one million euros was given to the International Committee of the Red Cross, and numerous German non-governmental organizations split the remaining one

BERLIN 00001601 002 OF 002

million euros. Since 2003, the MFA has provided over 27 million euros for human aid in Iraq.

#### ECONOMIC INTEREST INCREASES

¶8. (C) EconOff met with Middle East Office Director Dr. Juergen Friedrich and Semtner on November 19 to discuss the October visit of a delegation of German businessmen to Erbil to evaluate prospects for German investment in Iraq. Over 50 German businesses were represented, most from construction-related industries such as architecture, engineering, consulting, management, logistics, and information technology.

¶9. (C) When asked about Germany's next step in its Iraq engagement, Friedrich admitted that the Ministry of Economics and MFA have yet to agree on a cohesive plan. One of the challenges was deciding on how to balance a Kurdish region versus Baghdad/other province focus. He said that Germany would welcome a joint effort with the US on business and investment in Iraq.

#### COMMENT

¶10. (C) Germany's main political parties and leaders seem to agree: Germany is finally ready to increase engagement in Iraq following five years of inconsequential movement. Steinmeier, who is also the SPD candidate for Chancellor for the September 2009 national elections, has heretofore moved very cautiously in examining ways in which Germany could improve engagement in Iraq. While we cannot expect any dramatic change to Germany's opposition to "boots-on-the-ground", the fact that increased German engagement in Iraq is not expected to be politicized in the 2009 elections demonstrates a shift in Berlin's thinking on this emotion-laden issue. We welcome opportunities to work more closely with the German government and private sector to increase German business' reengagement in Iraq. End comment.  
TIMKEN JR